

Fair Trade: How We Spend Our Money is a Moral Issue

Money, like many other things, can be used for great good or great evil. A wise person once pointed out that while we vote every few years, we spend money every day. The choices we make with our dollars can have as great an influence on society as the choices we make on our ballots.



In the U.S. and throughout the world, workers toil under unsafe, exploitative conditions in fields, mines and factories. Women, men and, yes, even children live in misery producing the consumer goods that we buy. We “vote” with our dollars when we support the system that destroys their human dignity.



However we can choose a different system, called Fair Trade. Fairly traded items undergo a certification process to ensure that the producers receive a decent wage under decent working conditions. Catholic Relief Services describes Fair Trade criteria this way:

- ◆ Paying a fair wage in the local context
- ◆ Offering employees opportunities for advancement
- ◆ Providing equal employment opportunities for all people, particularly the most disadvantaged
- ◆ Caring for God’s creation by engaging in environmentally sustainable practices
- ◆ Being open to public accountability
- ◆ Building long-term trade relationships
- ◆ Providing healthy and safe working conditions within the local context
- ◆ Providing financial and technical assistance to producers whenever possible



Fairly traded agricultural items include coffee, tea, chocolate, spices, flowers and bananas. A whole variety of other Fair Trade goods is also available, from clothing to household goods to rugs to jewelry to soccer balls. Visit the web site of CRS’ Fair Trade Program <http://www.crsfairtrade.org/> and Fair Trade USA <http://fairtradeusa.org/products-partners> to learn more.



All of the items pictured on this page are available through the not-for-profit organization SERV, which partners with CRS. See http://www.serrv.org/crs_handcraft?c=crs to order.

Remember Fair Trade when shopping for graduation, wedding and baby shower gifts. Often you can find a Fair Trade equivalent to the items on a gift registry from a “big box store.” The price for Fair Trade products can be quite similar to other items. However, even if you pay a bit more, consider it an investment in a better, fairer world. Use your money for good, to protect human dignity and build up the reign of God.

You can promote Fair Trade -

*By organizing a sale of Fair Trade goods at your parish

*By ensuring your parish serves Fair Trade coffee and tea

*By asking the manager of your grocery store to stock Fair Trade items

To learn more, contact our diocesan CRS liaison Kathy Dubel at 607-734-9784 ext. 2135 or KDubel@dor.org



Whatever we buy was produced through the work of human hands. Real people, like those pictured above from an artisan group in Bangladesh, are behind our purchasing decisions. Here is their story, one among the many groups whose products SERVV sells:

“VillageWorks currently works with over 100 artisans, some who are physically handicapped due to the war land mines that remain in fields around the country, and some due to the disease of polio. Women are also employed in weaving fabric in a production center close to their homes, where they can keep an eye on their young children and balance household tasks when needed.

VillageWorks strives to empower their artisans with confidence and self-sufficiency, as well as income to support their families. By working with VillageWorks, artisans gain new knowledge of dyeing, weaving, and accessory production, and an increased ability to find stable employment should they seek work elsewhere.

SERVV has supported the growth of VillageWorks throughout the last eight years with dyeing and sewing trainings, a silk screen training, product design support, and emergency support when damage from flooding occurred after a typhoon. This year, we were thrilled to offer both a grant for skills training and a low-interest loan for renovation of the production center to better equip wheelchairs and to enlarge the space for training 20 additional handicapped artisans in sewing and detailing accessories.”



Justice & Peace Ministry Staff of Catholic Charities:

Monroe 585-546-7220 Marvin Mich ext. 7021; MMich@cferochester.org / Ruth Marchetti ext. 7099; RMarchetti@cferochester.org

Chemung/Schuylers/Tioga Kathy Dubel 607-734-9784 ext. 2135; KDubel@dor.org

Cayuga/Ontario/ Seneca/Tompkins/Yates Laurie Konwinski 607-272-5062 ext. 12; LKonwinski@dor.org

Livingston Tabitha Brewster 585-658-4466 ext. 13; TBrewster@dor.org

Steuben Lynda Lowin 607-776-8085 ext. 217; LLowin@dor.org

Wayne Peter Dohr 315-331-4867; PDohr@dor.org

Diocesan Life Issues Coordinator: Suzanne Stack 585-328-3210 ext. 1304; SStack@dor.org